

Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda

Jawaharlal Nehru



ADVAITA ASHRAMA

Wajahat

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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BY
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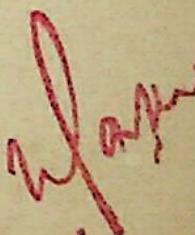
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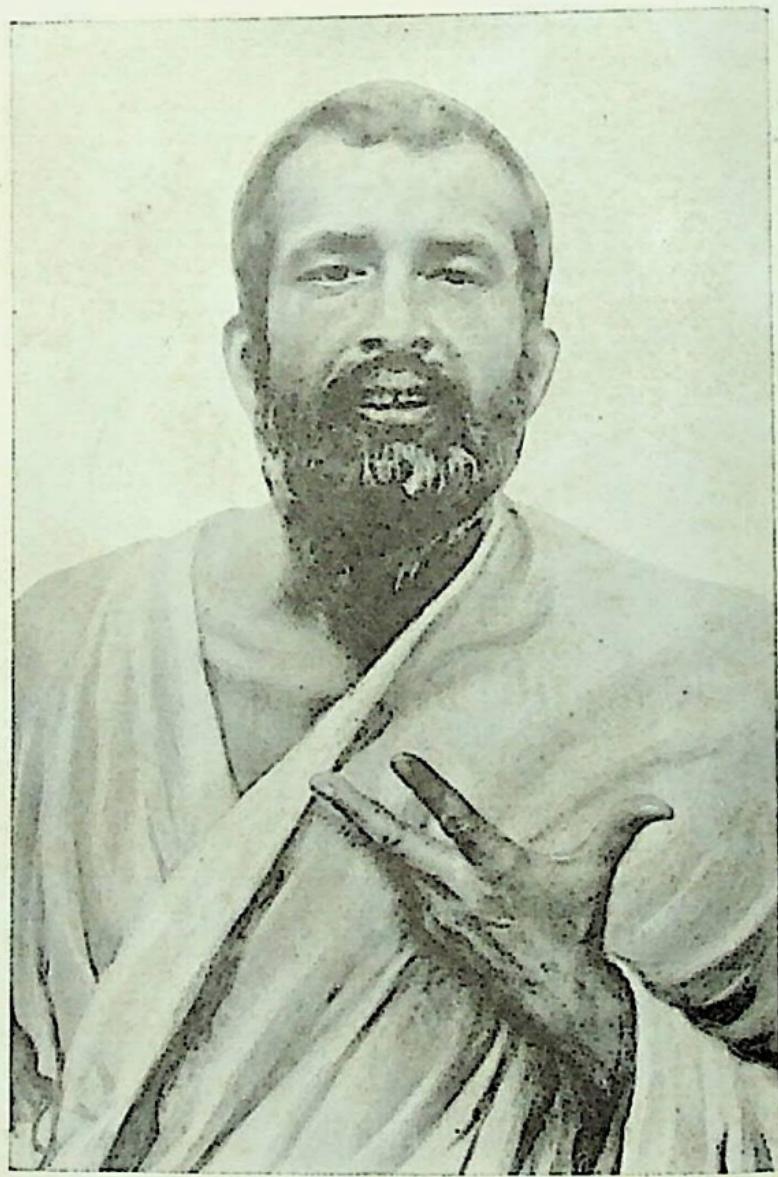
PREFACE

Students of the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda are likely to be very much interested in what an eminent person like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has to say about them. Panditji's speech is a witness to the silent but strong and steady influence that the universal religious ideas of Sri Ramakrishna have been exerting upon the minds of all thinking and educated Indians. Swami Vivekananda spread these life-giving ideas of his Master in India as well as outside. We believe the testimony of Panditji to the greatness of the spiritual renaissance inaugurated in the last century by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda is worthy of preservation in a permanent form. Hence this small booklet.

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Sri Ramakrishna

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AND
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Swamiji and friends, I am grateful for this invitation to come to this celebration and I am glad to take this opportunity to express my homage to the memory of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. I do not know that I am particularly fitted to speak about the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, because he was a man of God and I am a man of earth and engaged in earthly activities which consume all my energy. But even a man of earth can admire and perhaps be influenced by a man of God, and so I have been admiring godly men, though sometimes I do not altogether under-

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stand ; and though I do not fully understand what they said, I have admired these great men of God, and have been influenced by reading what was written about them by their disciples. These extraordinary personalities have powerfully influenced their generation and the succeeding generations. They have powerfully influenced great men and changed the whole tenor of their lives. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa obviously was completely outside the run of average humanity. He appears to be in the tradition of the great *rishis* of India, who have come from time to time to draw our attention to the higher things of life and of the spirit. For India never ignored, in the course of her long history and in spite of the other activities of the world, the spiritual values of life, and she always laid certain stress on the search for truth and has always

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welcomed the searchers of truth by whatever names they may call themselves. And so India built up this tradition of the search for truth and reality, and at the same time she built up the tradition of the utmost tolerance to those who earnestly strive for the truth in their own way. Unfortunately, recently, that tradition of tolerance has been rather shaken and we have sometimes fallen into evil ways and have become narrow-minded and thought that we people who walk in a certain narrow path alone are right and others are wrong.

That has never been the tradition of India. What made India great was her broadmindedness. It was her conviction that truth is many-sided and of infinite variety. How can any man presume to say that he only has grasped the entire truth? If he is earnest in the search for truth, he

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may say that he saw a particular facet of truth. But how can he say that somebody else has not seen truth, unless he follows a similar path? So India encouraged the pursuit of truth, and of moral values, and that was perhaps the most distinctive feature of India's culture. And in spite of the many ups and downs of her history, something of the original impress continues throughout these long ages.

One of the effects of Sri Ramakrishna's life was the peculiar way in which he influenced other people who came in contact with him. Men often scoffed from a distance at this man of no learning, and yet when they came to him, very soon they bowed their heads before this man of God and ceased to scoff and 'remained to pray'. They gave up, many of them, their ordinary vocations in life and business and



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joined the band of devotees. They were great men and one of them, better known than the others, not only in India but in other parts of the world, is Swami Vivekananda. I do not know how many of the younger generation read the speeches and the writings of Swami Vivekananda. But I can tell you that many of my generation were very powerfully influenced by him and I think that it would do a great deal of good to the present generation if they also went through Swami Vivekananda's writings and speeches, and they would learn much from them. That would, perhaps, as some of us did, enable us to catch a glimpse of that fire that raged in Swami Vivekananda's mind and heart and which ultimately consumed him at an early age. Because there was fire in his heart—the fire of a great personality coming out in

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eloquent and ennobling language—it was no empty talk that he was indulging in. He was putting his heart and soul into the words he uttered. Therefore he became a great orator, not with the orators' flashes and flourishes but with a deep conviction and earnestness of spirit. And so he influenced powerfully the minds of many in India and two or three generations of young men and women have no doubt been influenced by him. Other things have happened in this country and a very great man came—Gandhiji, who shook up the whole of India—another great man in the old line of *rishis* of India.

Much has happened which perhaps makes some forget those who came before and who prepared India and shaped India in those early and difficult days. If you read Swami Vivekananda's writings and

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speeches, the curious thing you will find is that they are not old. It was told 56 years ago, and they are fresh today because, what he wrote or spoke about dealt with certain fundamental matters and aspects of our problems or the world's problems. Therefore they do not become old. They are fresh even though you read them now.

He gave us something which brings us, if I may use the word, a certain pride in our inheritance. He did not spare us. He talked of our weaknesses and our failings too. He did not wish to hide anything. Indeed he should not. Because we have to correct those failings, he deals with those failings also. Sometimes he strikes hard at us, but sometimes points out the great things for which India stood and which even in the days of India's downfall made her, in some measure, continue to be great.

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So what Swamiji has written and said is of interest and must interest us and is likely to influence us for a long time to come. He was no politician in the ordinary sense of the word and yet he was, I think, one of the great founders—if you like, you may use any other word—of the national modern movement of India, and a great number of people who took more or less an active part in that movement in a later date drew their inspiration from Swami Vivekananda. Directly or indirectly he has powerfully influenced the India of today. And I think that our younger generation will take advantage of this fountain of wisdom, of spirit and fire, that flows through Swami Vivekananda.

We are faced in India and the world with many problems, terribly difficult problems. How are we to deal with them?

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There is the politician's way of dealing with them, the statesman's way if you like—I am not talking to you about the opportunists. Unfortunately, the politician or statesman has, to some extent, to be opportunist in the sense that he has to deal with things as they are, with the materials that he has. He cannot put across something which the people do not understand or cannot live up to. He has to face that difficulty always, and what is more, especially in an age which calls itself democratic—and democracy I believe is fundamentally good—but democracy also means that what you do must ultimately be understood and appreciated and acted upon by a large majority of people. If the large numbers of people do not understand or do not appreciate it, then even the truth that you possess cannot be put across to them. So the politicians

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and statesmen have to make, very often, compromises even with the truth because the people's receptivity of truth is not enough. I do not know whether this is good or bad. But it so happens, and looking at it from a statesman's or a politician's point of view, there appears to be no alternative, for, if he were to do something else, he would be pushed away, and others with a clearer perception of the limitations of the majority will take his place. Now, on the other hand, the prophets deal with truth in a different way. The prophet sticks to truth whatever the consequences and often because he sticks to truth, he is stoned to death or shot or killed in some other way. That is the way of the prophet. That has been the way and that will still be the way of the prophet. Of course the prophet is stoned to death or killed, but the

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killer does not kill the truth. Truth is greater even than the prophet and the prophet lives in that truth even more vividly than if he had been alive.

Always there are these two approaches. The approach of the prophet and the approach of the political leader or statesman. Neither approach can be said to be, at least in terms of today, or in terms of a limited period, a wholly effective approach. In long distance terms one might say, perhaps, that the prophet's approach is the best ; but one cannot carry on politics or public affairs of a country in these days through long distance terms though generations later the truth will be appreciated, because he will cease to have the opportunity to carry on if he did that. Though the prophet's way may theoretically be the best, it does seem a little difficult to give effect to it during his

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time. On the other hand, the politician's and the statesman's way, however well meant, leads from compromise to compromise. It is a slippery path. Once you enter that path, each succeeding compromise might lead you farther away from the truth. What one may want to do may be ignored in the existing circumstances. Shall we hold on to the truth as we see it or shall we think so much about the existing circumstances as to forget the truth itself? That is the problem that humanity and people who are responsible for the ordering of things in this world have continually to face and it is a very difficult problem, and all one can say is that in so far as it is possible, the statesman should adhere to truth, or, at any rate, he should aim at that truth, even though he may indulge in temporary compromises. Once he loses sight of that, then he might

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go astray, very far. It is difficult to deal with day to day affairs without paying any heed to the understanding and receptivity of men's minds to the truth. It is important to know how far that truth is understood and finds some kind of reception in men's minds. If the politician does not do so, if his words pass over their heads, then even the prophet's words have no meaning to these people. Therefore one has to interpret that truth and limit it, even to some extent, from the point of view of man's receptivity to it.

Now we live in an age when scientific and technical advances have gone very far indeed, more especially in a country like the USA. Technically and industrially they are a very advanced country and they have achieved there a high standard of material and physical life. I have no doubt that

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culturally too, they are advancing in many ways. Nevertheless, it must be said of the world that man's mental or moral advance has not kept pace with his technical and scientific advance, and that is a dangerous thing, because science and technology are weapons of tremendous power. We have got these weapons, if you like, in the atomic power: Atomic energy can be used, I think, when it can be produced in simpler ways, for the tremendous benefit of the human race. Atomic energy can also be used for destruction on a colossal scale of the human race. Science and technology are just things which are neither good nor bad ; it is the user of them that can be good or bad. And if a human being gets these tremendous weapons it becomes very important that he should know how to use them properly ; that means that he should be morally and spiritually

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advanced to know how to use them properly for proper needs. He should know what he is aiming at ultimately. Now it can be said that humanity as a whole, individuals apart, has not advanced to that standard yet, despite all the religions, all the churches, temples and mosques to the contrary. And that is the misfortune of the age. We fight for our petty dogmas and petty customs amongst ourselves, calling ourselves religious men and the like, while we do not even know how to behave to our neighbours properly and decently, and the world hovers on the edge of repeated catastrophes. We find, therefore, in the world two types of forces, call them if you like, forces of destruction and forces of construction. For the moment, if I say that I have faith in the forces of construction, I cannot justify that statement except by saying that it is an act of faith on

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my part, there is no particular logic behind it; it is just that I believe in it, although I cannot justify it. Nevertheless, whether you believe in it or not, one should make up one's mind clearly as to how we are going to strengthen these unifying and constructive forces and oppose those forces which destroy and disrupt. And I think you can only do that if you have a certain moral foundation, certain moral concepts which will hold together your ideals and your general life. If you have none then the disruptive forces, I think, are bound to gain advantage.

Now to come back to what I began with, men like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, men like Swami Vivekananda and men like Mahatma Gandhi are great unifying forces, great constructive geniuses of the world (*loud and prolonged cheers*) not only in regard to the particular teachings that they taught,

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but their approach to the world and their conscious and unconscious influence on it is of the most vital importance to us. You may or you may not accept some particular advice of Mahatmaji on economic or other grounds. But his fundamental approach to life, his constructive unifying approach as applied to various problems of India, that is of vital importance. If you do not accept that, then you really are on the side of destruction and disruption. His approach—quite apart from the particular advice that he gave—his approach was fundamentally the approach of India, of the Indian Mind and of the Indian genius. (*Loud cheers*). Although Sri Ramakrishna was a man of God and religion, and was not saying anything about politics, it is his fundamental approach that counts. And while I am a man of politics, not dabbling much in or

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saying much about other matters, spirituality and the like, nevertheless, I do feel that our public affairs and our life in general, would become much the poorer in quality, if that spiritual element and the moral standard were lacking. India, as the rest of the world, faces these difficult problems and questions, and all of us, whether as individuals, communities, groups or nations, are being put to very severe tests. Because I have faith in India, I believe that India will not only survive these tests, but will make good ; because, I think, that in spite of our weakness there is fundamental vitality which has enabled it to carry on all these millennia of years and which will now function much more effectively and vividly having got the opportunity now. I have that faith ; but faith is not enough. We have to work for it, and we have not only to work for it, but

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work for it with that clear vision before us. That vision we may apply to India, but it is essentially a larger vision to be applied to the world. It is not a narrowing vision. Our nationalism must not be a narrow nationalism. Swami Vivekananda, though a great nationalist, never preached anything else. His was a kind of nationalism which automatically slipped into Indian nationalism which was part of internationalism. So, it is that broad approach that we must learn from those great men and if we learn it and act up to it to the best of our ability, then we shall honour their memory and we shall serve our country with some advantage, and possibly also serve humanity. *Jai Hind.*

[An authorized version of the speech delivered by Sri Jawaharlal Nehru on 20 March, 1949 at the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, on the occasion of the 114th birthday anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna.]

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